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The Party in Time

Jonathan White (LSE)

Trends of falling membership and support spell a time of crisis for political parties, possibly of transformation. Dilemmas of principle arise: should partisans revise their normative commitments in whatever way garners new supporters, or would that be to sell their party's soul? The article investigates this as a problem of intergenerational obligation, examining what consideration, if any, partisans owe their party's past and future. It seeks to show the limits of conceiving partisanship as a 'presentist' activity, legitimately governed exclusively by the concerns of the present generation, and argues it must include some notion of showing loyalty to the actions of predecessors and advancing the prospects of those to come. Two corresponding norms of ethical partisanship – fidelity and sustainability – are outlined and discussed. The article's goal is to refine our concept of what a party is, and in so doing contribute to a broader ethics of activism.

Membership of an association, be it a state, family or ethnic group, is often said to bring with it a distinct set of obligations.* In the case of a political party, as typically a voluntary organisation, that there should be such obligations may seem self-evident. To commit to a cause is to make collective projects one's own, something that necessarily involves a measure of self-restraint and sacrifice. Yet the extent of such obligations – to whom or what they are owed, and how constraining their demands should be – is less clear. For some, the obligations specific to the partisan may be quite limited, along the lines of a duty of loyalty to those immediate colleagues whose political fortunes they share. For others they will be rather more extensive, entailing a commitment to some larger community of the like-minded, extended in space and time. The obligations incumbent on partisans, independent of those they may incur as citizens or in other social roles, can be sketched in contrasting ways.

Existing treatments of partisan obligation generally approach it as a special case of *political* obligation.¹ A core concern is how partisan conflict can be made compatible with a liberal order:

* The article significantly benefitted from the feedback of Geoff Brennan, John Dryzek, Dimitris Efthymiou, Nic Southwood, Fabio Wolkenstein and Lea Ypi, as well as participants of the Moral, Social and Political Theory Seminar at the Australian National University (ANU), four referees of this Journal and its Editor. The research was facilitated by a visiting fellowship at ANU's School of Philosophy, and a fellowship at the Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin funded by the EURIAS programme.

¹ The major recent works on partisanship are Rosenblum 2008 and Muirhead 2014. See also Portis, Gundersen & Shively 2000; specifically on partisan obligation, see Bonotti 2012.

questions of tolerance, free speech, and the scope for civil disobedience are to the fore, with the emphasis therefore on what partisans owe to those beyond their own circle – to their political opponents and the wider political community. Rarer is a focus on what partisans, as members of a collective, owe their fellow members of the party. Some of the essential elements such as an ethics of partisanship might have been highlighted in the occasional work on intra-party deliberation, participation, and respect for dissenting opinion.² I want to introduce a different dimension, concerning what partisans owe their fellows in respect of their party's past and future. This is a distinct area of partisan ethics, centred on the party's evolution in time. Guided by an idea of partisanship as directed to the advancing of a long-term political project, I propose to explore the nature of partisan ties by approaching them as a question of intergenerational obligation.

Thinking about partisanship in this time-sensitive fashion is important if we are to fully understand, critically appraise, perhaps even respond to, some of the key political trends of contemporary western democracy. For many parties, recent years have seen declining rates of membership and increasingly uncertain voter support. Where once labour parties might have hoped to count on the stable allegiance of a working class, and conservative parties on that of the moneyed and propertied, today things seem more unsettled. What political scientists call processes of 'de-alignment'³ have left parties needing to adapt if they are to survive. One of the ways they have done so is by making fundamental revisions to party doctrine, in some cases changing their constitution to do so. This was the route the *Third Way* parties of the 1990s chose, severing themselves from much of their socialist traditions in the name of modernisation.⁴ Conservative and centrist parties have seen parallel shifts, described with such terms as 'neo-conservatism' and 'neo-liberalism'.

² Muirhead 2014, 2006; Teorell 1999.

³ Dalton and Wattenberg 2000.

⁴ On the case of the British Labour Party and its revision of Clause IV of the party constitution in 1995, see below. For the German SPD, the birth of the *Neue Mitte* is generally dated to the months following the party's arrival in government in 1998.

Such parties are heavily criticised from within for disowning the commitments they once stood for. An effort to shore up party support has been widely viewed as an exercise in ‘selling out’. Yet the same critical attitude has appeared to others as a form of dogmatism. Mature politics, it is suggested, involves revising one’s commitments as the electorate evolves. Parties must keep up with the times. At stake in these disputes are the parameters within which any process of partisan re-definition may legitimately unfold. This in turn reflects, I suggest, how one draws the contours of partisan obligation. Decisions to re-orient a party inevitably put the actions of predecessors and successors in a new light; the question is how much this matters. The pressing strategic decisions facing many parties today have thus brought a particular dimension of partisan ethics to the fore.

In the ethics of political community more broadly, questions of cross-temporal obligation have been usefully approached by distinguishing backward- and forward-looking perspectives.⁵ This distinction can be applied to the present enquiry. In the first category, one might ask how far partisans have an obligation to remain faithful to the convictions of preceding partisans. Does membership of an organisation extended in time, with an established history and an unbounded future, introduce constraints on the scope for legitimate political reinvention? Or should one emphasise the autonomy of today’s members – the ‘sovereignty of the living generation’? In the second category – the forward-looking perspective – one may ask whether the partisans of the present have obligations concerning their party’s future. Might one talk of a duty to balance short-term gains such as electoral success against the party’s long-term organisational and programmatic sustainability? How far, in short, should one conceive partisan obligations as extending cross-temporally?

⁵ See e.g. Gosseries & Meyer 2009.

I begin with an examination of what might be called the ‘presentist’ view of the party, in which obligations connected to the party’s past and future are absent. In such a perspective, a party is correctly understood as an association of individuals whose mutual obligations, such that they are, are independent of the party’s history and long-term trajectory. I argue this view is problematic, partly because it downplays one of the sources of a party’s public credibility – its constancy of programme – but more crucially because it is in tension with one of the good reasons individuals may have to associate with a party: the commitment to a political project whose full realisation necessarily lies in the long term, perhaps beyond the human lifespan. Partisanship finds one of its strongest rationales in the idea of the party as a cross-temporal collective whose members’ efforts cumulate across time. Insofar as partisans ought to respect the good reasons for which their fellow partisans may associate with the party, they should not be indifferent to the party’s coherence across time. The article goes on to explore the merits of an alternative account in which partisans *do* have cross-temporal obligations, both ‘ascending’ ones addressed to the past and ‘descending’ ones addressed to the future. I sketch how the attendant obligations might look, outlining two norms of *fidelity* and *sustainability*. Such obligations need not always trump countervailing concerns: they apply in a context in which other citizen obligations continue to hold, and sometimes the demands of the latter will be judged superior. But these obligations should be recognised, I argue, as one element in the moral calculus of partisanship.⁶

Thinking about group obligation is one way to explore the nature of the group. The article’s primary goal is to refine our concept of what a party is, offering a corrective to those accounts that cast it as but a network of office-seeking individuals. A richer conception is needed if one is to grasp the stakes of contemporary partisan crisis and transformation, and make a critical evaluation of the strategies adopted by contemporary political elites. More widely, the article seeks to develop

⁶ On ‘presumptively decisive reasons’ for action, see Scheffler 1997, p.196; see also Horton 2010, pp.12-13.

one branch of an ethics of activism. The political party, broadly understood, has been one of the paradigmatic forms of political involvement in the modern age, and arguably still represents an important source of desirable change. If its progressive potential is to be realised, reflection on the moral basis of the demands it makes seems important. In particular, in a period when real-world social and political movements often display an ephemeral quality, emerging and receding at some speed, it seems important to reflect on the activist's position in time.

I. Sovereignty of the Living Generation? Presentist Conceptions of the Party

I shall call the *presentist conception of the party* the view that holds that partisans, as partisans, have no meaningful cross-temporal obligations. By 'partisans' I understand those who claim unity in the name of a shared conception of the public good and how best to realise it (a *normative programme*, as I call it), and who participate in coordinated activities designed to bring this interpretation to bear on authoritative political decision-making.⁷ Provisionally, for simplicity, I shall refer only to those who are party members in the formal sense, though later I shall touch on the more ambiguous case of those who are consistent supporters without being formal members ('partisans beyond the party', as one might call them).⁸

In this presentist view, partisans have no reason to feel constrained in their decisions by concerns arising from how these decisions relate to the party's past. Nor need they make special allowance for the party's future, insofar as this is separable from their own immediate fortunes and the fortunes of the wider public on whose behalf they act. They have full discretion to discard or

⁷ Cf. White & Ypi 2011; White 2014. This definition emphasises a *claim* to unity: I assume this unity will often be imperfect, and that parties will tend to display diversity of ideas and disagreement. I do not exclude, moreover, that these disagreements may be beneficial to parties, so long as the claim to unity prevails.

⁸ Cf. Bonotti 2012.

retain the existing normative programme as they fit, and full discretion to discount the party's long-term prospects in favour of its short-term success, construed as electoral popularity, policy impact, or whatever else. They are unencumbered by cross-temporal partisan obligations. Borrowing a term used in eighteenth-century debates on the desirability of binding state constitutions, we might summarise this view as endorsing 'the sovereignty of the living generation'.⁹

Such a position can be found in what is sometimes called the *economic* view of the party, which conceives it as a network of elites seeking to maximise personal advantage. The view has been popular in the study of parties, within and beyond the rational-choice tradition. In this perspective, the party is conceived compatibly with the definition above, but with the additional proposition that the guiding motive of action is individual utility-maximisation.¹⁰ Partisans are conceived as office-seekers, their decisions led principally by a concern for what will be electorally popular amongst a population of voters in the moving present. Although an argument against intergenerational obligation is rarely made explicit by adherents to this view, the focus on electoral measures of partisan success, which entail a numerically determinate population of voters comprised of those living at a given moment, implies a model of partisan rationality in which cross-temporal concerns are largely absent.

That partisans oriented only to immediate success will lose public credibility over time is a point supporters of this view may freely concede.¹¹ If the world to which normative programmes are addressed is at all stable, what partisans advocate today and tomorrow ought to bear some resemblance, else their actions become too unpredictable to be meaningfully endorsed. Constancy of message is important, such authors will accept, even if partisanship is ultimately about nothing more than efficiency at winning power. This might be seen as a concession to the importance of cross-temporal demands – to the need for the ideal partisan to bring tomorrow's voters into their

⁹ Jefferson 1975 [1798].

¹⁰ For the classic account, see Downs 1957a (esp. p.137); cf. 1957b.

¹¹ Downs 1957a, p.142.

calculus alongside today's. But the argument turns on strategy rather than ethics. In this line of reasoning, in which voter behaviour is the ultimate measure of good (that is, effective) partisanship, cross-temporal thinking only becomes important to the extent that it helps to win votes. The implication is that if voters are willing to endorse radical ruptures in programme, constancy of message does not matter. In other words, this concern with political credibility reflects merely an expectation of what kind of partisan strategy is likely to be successful. It is not derived from an assessment of what configuration of obligations is constitutive of partisanship. No intrinsic value is attached to the effort to harmonise present-day partisan actions with those of past and future.

I foreground the economic view because it is a familiar one in the study of partisanship, but presentist conceptions need not take this form. A less utility-oriented account is possible, whereby partisans have other-regarding goals, yet full discretion to pursue them as they see fit, unburdened by backward- and forward-looking partisan considerations. In the Jeffersonian reasoning against perpetual state constitutions, the sovereignty of the living generation is of course necessary not so as to liberate decision-makers to pursue selfish interests but so as to prevent their being constrained by commitments not of their own making.¹² Similar arguments might be developed for the party, such that present-day partisans are said to be able to pursue their normative programme adequately only if their hands are not tied by the commitments and prospects of those of another time. It is their judgement which is thus privileged, not their interests narrowly understood. Such a view amounts to an enlightened presentism, for it is compatible with the intention to pursue the interests of a wider constituency. It is, however, in one important respect similar to the outlook previously described: no intrinsic value is placed on seeking to align present-day partisan actions with those of yesterday and tomorrow.

¹² Jefferson 1975 [1798]. His remarks relate primarily to the transfer of debt, but are sufficiently generalised at the end of the letter to bear on the present case.

I want to contest this position without simply referring to the questionable credibility amongst voters that presentism may or may not entail. The major limitation of a presentist perspective lies, I suggest, in its discordance with the good reasons for which an individual might choose to associate with a party in the first place.

Whatever their political orientation, one of the important rationales available to individuals to motivate their involvement in partisan activity is, I suggest, the idea of helping to advance the kinds of normative ideal that require coordinated effort over time. Justice, equality, fairness, freedom, democracy, national development, conservation – while small victories that favour these ends can be aimed at in the short to medium term, they resist immediate satisfaction in anything like their entirety. Those who commit themselves to a party defined by such goals, though they may set themselves more achievable, less high-minded goals also, ultimately commit themselves to goals which cannot be fully realised within a single electoral cycle, a single period of office, a single political career, or indeed the individual lifespan.¹³ They commit themselves to projects that require time for their implementation, and that cannot be tackled on the relatively short timescale of a political mandate. The value of the party lies in the way its extended lifespan makes the pursuit of these long-term projects possible. Borrowing terminology from existing discussions of intergenerational justice, we might say that the party represents a distinctive means to address ‘lifetime-transcending interests’.¹⁴ It provides an opportunity for those associated with it both to

¹³ Party scholars sometimes distinguish ‘material’ incentives for party affiliation (to do with rewards of income, power or career opportunity) from ‘solidary’ ones (to do with opportunities for the formation of social ties) and ‘purposive’ ones (to do with the advancement of political goals) (Ware 1996, chap. 2; Bruter & Harrison 2009, pp.33ff.). My interest here is on the last of these, which is generally considered the most prominent in contemporary partisanship (certainly amongst European parties – Ware 1996; cf. Bruter & Harrison 2009, pp.18ff. on ‘moral-minded’ members – but seemingly in North America too – cf. Young & Cross 2002). Elements of the second incentive (‘solidary’) may also be present in the idea of the party as a cross-temporal project, insofar as this carries communitarian implications and may be one source of the sense of collective identity traditionally connected to party membership.

¹⁴ Thompson 2002; Thompson in Gosseries & Meyer 2009.

contribute to an ongoing, cumulative project and, less instrumentally and more expressively, to align themselves publicly with the ideas that inspire it.¹⁵

To be sure, for some individuals, personal power and prestige may be sufficient reasons to associate with a party, as the economic conception suggests. But while this may be an adequate motivation for some – particularly for those with realistic prospects of achieving a position of leadership within the party – for others it will be quite implausible.¹⁶ Many partisans – especially those affiliated to large parties – may not be in a position to justify their involvement in terms of interest-maximisation, since they may gain little in strictly material terms. Economic theories of the party generally have little to say about what brings the ordinary partisan on board – yet without them there is no party.¹⁷ Nor can an enlightened presentism adequately be the source of their allegiance. Those who take other-regarding commitments seriously and wish to shape institutions to reflect them must reckon with the fact that to realise goals through the political process demands patient efforts extended in time. Even in its more modest forms, partisanship is a protracted business, not least because political institutions themselves – the procedures of election, legislation, execution, and so on – have their own distinctive tempo to follow. Moreover, ongoing partisan dedication is required so that political achievements, once attained, are maintained. Those who join a party expecting immediate and lasting results will typically be soon disappointed. If their involvement is to be meaningful, objectively and subjectively, an alternative rationale for association is needed: the idea of commitment to an ongoing collective project provides this.

¹⁵ For studies of such motivations in the British Labour and Conservative parties, see Whiteley & Seyd 1992; Whiteley et al 1994.

¹⁶ That ‘rank-and-file’ partisans may be motivated less by interest and more by principle is a point long observed: see Hume ([1748] 1998), essay 8, ‘Of the Parties of Great Britain’, p.41: ‘Thus *Court* and *Country*, which are the genuine offspring of the British government, are a kind of mixed parties, and are influenced both by principle and by interest. The heads of the factions are commonly most governed by the latter motive; the inferior members of them by the former.’ The point appears in comparative politics as ‘May’s Law’: see May 1973.

¹⁷ The economic model arguably relies tacitly on a substrate of non-utilitarian motivations. Cf. Whiteley et al. 1994, chap. 4.

Here one gets the first glimpse of a possible theory of partisan cross-temporal obligation, though it is not my aim to develop it in detail yet. If the idea of the party as advancing a cumulative, cross-temporal project provides a strong rationale for engaging in partisanship, then arguably this motivation deserves some form of respect, for it is the *quid pro quo* of the sacrifice and self-restraint that partisanship demands. As partisans seek to influence the course of their party, they should not be indifferent to the commitments of predecessors, whose efforts were crucial to the party's development and whose contributions find their meaning in the belief they will be continued. Partisans failing to show due respect for this motivation would be abusing the efforts of their fellow members, reaping the benefits of these efforts without acknowledging that which gives them their sense and coherence.

Cross-temporal concerns of this kind, it should be added, seem to form part of the self-understanding of partisans themselves. Moments of crisis in particular are a revealing site for the study of normative expectations. In the case of parties, notions of the intrinsic importance of constancy of normative programme are disclosed in those moments when a sub-grouping of the party sharply deviates from past practice. As noted, many are the party leaders in modern democracy who have been accused by large sections of their membership of having 'betrayed' their party's origins, 'sacrificed' its traditions, or 'sold its soul'.¹⁸ Such denunciations of broken commitments evoke the party as something larger than its living individuals – as part of an ongoing political project – and suggest the intrinsic worth of remaining faithful, one way or another, to the party's earlier incarnations.¹⁹ Nor are such ideas the preserve of a particular species of party. While the notion of commitment to a long-term normative project might seem to fit parties of the

¹⁸ In addition to the Third-Way examples mentioned, see e.g. the disputes in the 1950s in the German SPD concerning the Bad Godesberg programme (Lösche and Walter 1992, pp.110ff.; Potthoff and Miller 2002, pp.208ff); for the extreme case of Fidesz in Hungary, a party moving from left to right: Enyedi 2005. For an interesting political intervention seeking to capitalise on such expectations at the expense of another party, see Miliband 2010.

¹⁹ By contrast, in an association identical to its founding members (and thus without a history older than the present generation), such denunciations of broken tradition would sound odd.

Left in particular, as those historically oriented to social progress and ongoing struggle as the condition of its realisation, parties of the Centre and Right have by no means been immune to such concerns. Empirical observation reveals plenty of denunciations of betrayal here too.²⁰ Even those parties that go under the heading ‘conservative’ generally set themselves some kind of ongoing project – e.g. the restoration of a good society deemed to have decayed – and rarely cast themselves purely in the role of a rearguard action to defend the status quo.

In sum, if the unity of a party is grounded as I have suggested in shared political commitments, affiliation to it should be possible in terms of the goals it professes. Given these goals are generally of a long-term character, this possibility rests on the ongoing cooperation of other partisans, acting in such a way as to make cumulative moves towards those objectives possible. Further, the wider contribution of partisanship to democracy arguably rests in part on partisans having exactly such long-term goals, thereby establishing a systematic connection between political ideals and institutional decision-making.²¹ It is because the notion of partisanship as about a cross-temporal project is one of the most plausible rationales for partisan practice, as well as one apparently evident in the intuitions of partisans themselves, that it should form the basis for a more detailed exploration of partisan cross-temporal obligation.

II. Partisan ascending obligations: on a *norm of fidelity*

Reflections on intergenerational justice sometimes distinguish between *ascending* and *descending* obligations, that is, between obligations to predecessors and successors.²² The distinction can usefully be applied when thinking about the ethics of partisanship, and is adopted in this section and

²⁰ On debates led by Erwin Teufel in the German Christian Democratic Union (CDU), see White 2013.

²¹ White & Ypi 2010.

²² E.g. Gosseries in Gosseries & Meyer 2009.

the next to offer an account of how cross-temporal partisan obligations might look. My goal is to identify a core set of obligations that help illuminate some of the essentials of partisan ethics. The discussion is necessarily selective: additional obligations could very possibly be included, not least because the details of a party's ideological profile may generate obligations specific to partisans of that persuasion.²³

Before we begin, notice that to speak of obligations to predecessors and successors is to formulate matters in interpersonal terms, as ties to *people* rather than to institutions, traditions or values. One of the merits of this formulation is that it accords with the 'person-affecting intuition', whereby we assume that right or wrong acts, and the obligations that correspond to them, are such according to the positive or negative effects they have on persons.²⁴ If decisions affecting the course of a party are to be measured to some kind of normative standard, one would expect it to have something to do with how these decisions affect people (in the case in question, fellow partisans). By contrast, depersonalised obligation has a fundamentalist ring, suggesting an unbounded enthusiasm for 'the idea'.²⁵ To detach commitments from the persons they are shared and advanced with is to risk becoming deaf to the human costs that arise in their pursuit.

But to speak of obligations to predecessors and successors, rather than disembodied traditions, raises the challenging prospect of obligations to the dead and the unborn.²⁶ Especially the possibility of the former may seem dubious.²⁷ If someone no longer exists, what benefit or harm can be done them? Does their unawareness of later events not make them inviolable, and does

²³ There are some which I have chosen not to discuss which might be widely agreed upon, e.g. an obligation not to slander individuals. While significant, these are not central to the article's focus on evolving normative programmes.

²⁴ Parfit 1984, pp.370-1.

²⁵ The point is made by Georg Simmel in his classic contribution to the social theory of conflict: (Simmel 1904, p.511).

²⁶ But note: on a narrower reading, predecessors and successors can be construed as those older, *living* partisans who were most active with the party in an earlier phase of its history, and those living partisans-to-be currently involved for instance with the party's youth movement. The argument advanced over the following sections is compatible with this more modest reading of fidelity and sustainability.

²⁷ On problems to do with the latter, see the following section.

this not place them beyond the scope of a theory of obligation?²⁸ That the dead might be harmed by the living is implied, of course, by some common intuitions, notably that an injury is done when a person is posthumously slandered. That they are ignorant of the deed seems weak grounds on which to discount it. Of direct relevance to the argument that follows is the more general proposition, maintained in a substantial strand of moral philosophy, that the dead can be harmed or benefitted according to how far their deeply-held concerns are promoted after their death.²⁹ In this perspective, the fortunes of the dead, properly considered, are inseparable from the later trajectory of things dear to them – their children for instance, or the activities to which they dedicated themselves in life.³⁰ Their stake in these matters is ongoing, and how such concerns unfold after their deaths is germane to the degree of fulfilment that can be attributed to their lives. This fulfilment, argues Pitcher, is not reducible to a conscious state of happiness or satisfaction: a life can be compromised by developments of which the individual is unaware, and by extension it can be compromised by events which take place after its conclusion.³¹ In the case of partisans, one may suppose a deeply-held concern of the sort that bears on such fulfilment is the fate of the political project they choose to commit to. Whether the party prospers in a recognisable form is an important aspect of their self-realisation. This is the sense in which their welfare is dependent on the party's subsequent trajectory, and how they fall therefore within the purview of a theory of obligation.

Let us look more closely then at the first set of obligations to be considered: those of the backward-looking, 'ascending' kind. I have argued that a long-standing and coherent reason to be a partisan has been to contribute to the advance of 'lifetime-transcending interests'. Included in this rationale for partisanship is, I suggest, an expectation that tomorrow's partisans will seek to act in a

²⁸ Cf. Feinberg 1980, p.173.

²⁹ Ridge 2003, esp. pp.42ff.; Pitcher 1984; Feinberg 1980, pp.174ff.

³⁰ Pitcher 1984, p.184.

³¹ Cf. Pitcher 1984; Feinberg 1980, pp.64-6, p.175; O'Neill 1993, p.36.

way broadly consistent with the efforts of today's. Given that the fruits of these efforts will be deferred, and dependent for their realisation, partial or complete, on the labours of those to come, these activities are likely to derive much of their value for those engaged from the belief they will be continued, and certainly not discontinued or flouted arbitrarily. Partisanship may be classed as a 'future-oriented' practice in this sense.³² As such, it may be said to generate obligations amongst present-day partisans to show respect to the actions of their predecessors, and to give sense to the future-oriented spirit in which these were conducted.³³ This is what is intended by the above-mentioned *norm of fidelity*.

In the most obvious sense, fidelity might be taken to imply an obligation to act in strict accordance with the traditions of the party as established by its founding partisans. It can be read as the effort to adhere as far as possible to the inherited normative programme. In many parties the fundamentals of this programme are laid out in a constitutional text.³⁴ Such a text can be understood as the founders' effort to embed certain long-term commitments at the party's core. It is this text, one might argue, that authoritatively reveals their future-oriented projects and those of all partisans who choose to associate with the party over the course of its subsequent development. Fidelity to predecessors in this view means fidelity to the constitutional text.

Yet while strict conformity with a founding document is clearly a form of fidelity, such an interpretation is not without problems. First, it is liable to produce a rather static conception of the party in which partisans are condemned to 'live in the past'. It reserves partisanship for the dogmatic, understood as those unwilling to revise commitments in response to changing empirical circumstances. Second, one intuitively senses that it overstates the claim of past activists to set the course followed by their successors. The future-oriented actions of the dead or retired seem to achieve an unjustified dominance over the future-oriented actions of the presently engaged. While

³² Meyer 1997, pp.141ff.

³³ Muñiz-Fraticelli 2009.

³⁴ Cf. Smith and Gauja 2010.

a *presumption* of constancy in commitment seems plausible, strict conformity itself is too demanding. If this marks a reductive understanding of fidelity, what could be meant by it instead?

Rather than an obligation to avoid innovation at all costs, I interpret fidelity to mean an obligation to justify it and to pursue it incrementally. It amounts to a requirement to show, in convincing fashion, how new initiatives connect in some minimally coherent way to the traditions from which they depart, and to explain why their elements of novelty are needed. To better understand what this norm might entail, we may first set out the general criteria that might guide such a process of justification, before looking at an empirical case that clarifies their application in practice.

On this account of fidelity, deviations from past practice ought (1) to be the subject of partisan debate. They should be overt initiatives, openly weighed by fellow partisans rather than privately promoted by a faction. It is a minimum condition of holding predecessors in respect that their commitments be challenged openly rather than covertly, else their claim on the party's course is ignored. Beyond this basic requirement, we may hold that where departures from past practice are sought, these should (2) be credibly presented as building upon existing elements of the partisan tradition, not marking a wholesale rupture. Links to the commitments of predecessors ought to be visible, with innovations presented as reinterpretations of values shared by past and present partisans alike, or as extensions of older commitments into new domains. That innovations do not undermine broad swathes of existing commitments, even if they necessarily marginalise some, ought to be demonstrated. When it is proposed that Commitment X replace Commitment Y, it should be shown this is compatible with the continued pursuit of Commitments A, B, C. This holds, in addition to commitments traceable to the party's founding text, to those more recently affirmed in major documents such as manifestos.³⁵

³⁵ On the variety of texts that amount to a party's 'living constitution', see White, unpublished ms.

A further criterion we may stipulate is (3) that the necessity of such innovations should be properly accounted for. Short-term electoral popularity, or some general notion of change for change's sake, are weak grounds on which to compromise a party's constancy of programme. Where shifts in the party's direction are sought, these should be grounded in an analysis of how far-reaching changes in the wider society render certain commitments outmoded. To the extent that adaptations of programme can be convincingly related to societal change, the break with tradition leaves intact the rationality of partisan predecessors as they pursued their projects in a different social context, and indicates why the party must proceed in ways they could not have foreseen.³⁶

To illustrate how such considerations might play out in practice, it is useful to observe a concrete case at some critical moments. Perhaps no party history better illuminates the claims of fidelity than that of British Labour, a party of long traditions that has been subject more than once to pressures for a redefinition of its programme. In the two most prominent instances, the central question has concerned the party's commitment to public ownership in the economy. Clause IV of its 1918 constitution committed the party to seeking 'the common ownership of the means of production, distribution and exchange'. First under the leadership of Gaitskell in the years 1959-60, then under Blair in the years 1994-5, and both times in the context of electoral defeat, there were moves to revise this commitment. Each was a genuinely revisionist effort, designed to detach the party from a significant strand of its orthodox views.³⁷

How do these initiatives match up against the fidelity criteria described? Was the norm adhered to in practice? To their credit, both Gaitskell and Blair were quite open about the acts of redefinition they were proposing. In line with point (1), their initiatives were overt, publicly

³⁶ The importance of observing these criteria increases, one may add, in proportion to the scale of the changes proposed.

³⁷ On the emergence of this orthodoxy with the 1918 constitution, and its reproduction in the decades thereafter in major party documents, see Jones 2005, pp.18ff. As the author notes, that there is an identifiable orthodoxy does not mean the party's tradition is not composed of plural strands. Party traditions resemble in this way the ideological traditions they draw on: Freedon's account of ideologies in terms of core, adjacent and peripheral concepts that can be rearranged in diverse ways captures well this bounded pluralism (Freedon 1996, pp.77ff.).

announced at a party conference and much debated before a decision was made.³⁸ Furthermore, broadly consistent with (2), both involved efforts by the advocates of change to show how the innovations proposed were continuous with the party's traditions. A distinction was made between the means and the ends to which the party was committed: public ownership, argued the revisionists, was but the contextually-appropriate means to advance the underlying goals of equality and social welfare, which now needed to be pursued by other means.³⁹ To be sure, in Blair's case, the continuity was thinner – partisans in 1995 were being asked to embrace the principle of private ownership and competition, whereas in 1960 they were being asked simply to consider exceptions to the rule of public ownership.⁴⁰ Arguably the later shift risked emptying the Labour tradition of its coherence; it was also combined with open disparaging of large chunks of the party's past. But still, we may say, some effort to show continuity with the past was evident.⁴¹

Where the experiences significantly diverged was in regard to criterion (3), concerning the depth of analysis deployed to justify change. Gaitskell's initiative was underpinned by a comprehensive account of societal transformation, developed by intellectuals such as Crosland and widely disseminated in party literature, that sought to explain why public ownership no longer deserved the emphasis it had been granted in 1918.⁴² The initiative was also accompanied by clear arguments for where the party should be going. Blair's proposal, by contrast, lacked anything like this intellectual support. The main texts, such that they were, emerged in the years following. Also vaguer was the alternative that Labour partisans were to consider. Rather than on a principled case

³⁸ Gaitskell's was more overt than Blair's, in that it was explicitly presented as an effort to revise the party constitution. Famously, Blair did not mention Clause IV itself when first outlining his proposal (cf. Riddell 1997); the goal became apparent soon afterwards however. As a point of contrast, under the leadership of Neil Kinnock the party made changes in its manifesto commitments on public ownership probably equally as radical as Gaitskell and Blair were proposing, but without framing these overtly as a constitutional question (cf. Jones 2005, pp.123-4).

³⁹ Cf. Jones 2005, p.27; p.34. A similar strategy was adopted by revisionists in the German SPD in the debates leading up to the Bad Godesberg reorientation (Loesche and Walter 1992, pp.110ff.; Pothoff and Miller 2002, pp.208ff.).

⁴⁰ Cf. Kenny and Smith, 1997.

⁴¹ Also, Blairite revisionism was not quite as radical as a straight comparison with the 1950s suggests, given how the party had evolved in the intervening decades.

⁴² See esp. Crosland 1956.

for change, the burden of persuasion fell largely on data from polling and focus groups, and the prospect of further electoral defeats.⁴³ These failings of justification were all the more problematic, one may add, given the break with party tradition was to be all the more far-reaching in this case.

The norm of fidelity thus looks to have been fairly well served in the earlier phase of Labour revisionism, less so in the later one. In the former case an arguably modest break with the party's past was argued for with precision, in a way that upheld the rationality of what partisan predecessors had been seeking to achieve in an earlier societal context. In the latter case, a more radical break with the party's tradition was argued for loosely, and often with the explicit denigration of 'Old Labour' partisans. While both initiatives were revisionist, one displayed noticeably more appreciation than the other for the projects of partisans past.

Or at any rate, this is how it appears from the outside. The plausibility of revisionist claims is of course ultimately something for the assessment of partisans themselves. Partly a matter of individual judgement, it is also something for which, in any given party, institutional mechanisms are foreseeable as a means to guide evaluation and give voice to partisans past. While the party constitution is an obvious reference-point for establishing the party's core commitments, along with past manifestos and salient policy statements, such texts require interpretation. A deeper institutionalisation of the norm of fidelity might involve a party establishing a council of partisans, separate from the leadership, whose members act as authoritative interpreters of the tradition. Their role would be to engage in judicial-style reasoning concerning the meaning of the constitution, subsequent interpretations of it, and the kinds of precedent established by departures from it.⁴⁴

To conclude: the trajectory of any party will legitimately include elements of rupture as well as continuity. There will always be ways in which real-world conditions have changed

⁴³ On the intellectual underpinnings of Gaitskell's initiative, see Jones 2005, pp.25ff. On the looser argumentation of the Blairites, and the importance instead given to the social-psychological tools of focus group and survey, see Jones 2005, pp.137-8; Cronin 2004, p.14, pp.394ff.; Riddell 1997. A somewhat superficial approach also characterised the revisionist initiatives of the Kinnock era – as the leader himself would later acknowledge (Jones 2005, p.128).

⁴⁴ For a more detailed consideration of these institutional aspects, see Author forthcoming.

unforeseeably such that significant departures in programme are necessary. Sometimes the goals of yesterday will genuinely need to be pursued by different means; sometimes individual ends themselves, or their relative significance, may need to be reassessed. An obligation of fidelity nonetheless implies real constraints on how the partisans of the present may define and promote their normative programmes. It hitches a burden of justification to revisionist initiatives, and renders suspect the kind of opportunist strategy that seeks immediate popularity without regard for the party's longer-term past.⁴⁵

III. Partisan descending obligations: on a *norm of sustainability*

If partisans have *ascending* obligations, can one identify a corresponding set of *descending* obligations? Partisans, it may be said, have a duty to preserve the conditions in which the just-described process can continue into the future. For if G2 has obligations to G1 and its predecessors, G1 in turn has an obligation to bequeath to G2 the circumstances in which it can feasibly discharge its obligations to G1 and its predecessors, insofar as G1 has the power to do this.⁴⁶ This is an ethical – as opposed to merely prudential – demand, for it is a condition of partisan successors being in a position to continue to pursue the projects of their predecessors. Specifically, partisans can be said to have a duty to preserve the conditions in which future partisans can draw on a tradition and credibly present themselves as connected to it. This obligation I propose to examine under the heading of a *norm of sustainability*.

⁴⁵ These constraints are real unless one assumes yesterday's partisans would endorse whatever it takes for their successors to gain power, including the abandonment of the existing normative programme, or its public denial and entirely covert pursuit. I assume partisans committed to the party as cross-temporal project are not wholly indifferent to the ends the party promotes, nor willing for those ends to be pursued without public recognition.

⁴⁶ This assumes, of course, that the party's programme remains unfulfilled: should its work be done, there would be little need to sustain it. The assumption seems reasonable: historically there are few parties whose partisans have considered their work done, and even where their achievements are dramatic, these need to be defended.

How might this be interpreted? Clearly the transfer of material resources is likely to be one component. Without the basic foundation of sound party finances and a reasonable membership base, the ongoing viability of the party is in question. Just as important however is the party's endurance in an ideational rather than organisational sense, something which depends on the transfer of symbolic and intellectual resources. Future partisans will require a meaningful set of concepts and related vocabulary with which to articulate and continue a normative programme, and the visible public profile and good reputation needed to promote it.

This can be approached as a problem of conservation and depletion. One might speak for instance of a partisan obligation to avoid using the core concepts of the party's ideological tradition in contradictory ways such that their meaning is hollowed. Such a stipulation would exclude what political observers call 'cross-dressing', whereby party elites seek the short-term approval of a certain group of voters (or to de-mobilise those that might support competing parties) by making themselves ideologically indistinguishable from their opponents.⁴⁷ Such moves make it more difficult for their partisan successors to stake out a distinctive position and convincingly present themselves as part of an enduring political tradition. Rather than as members of a cross-temporal political project, they risk appearing as nothing but a collection of self-interested individuals, using political language for instrumental purposes rather than to express sincerely held commitments.

A related obligation concerns the influence partisans of the present may have on the wider political culture beyond their party. The sustainability of their partisanship depends on a culture in which the idea of principled disagreement between competing political views is readily accepted. In the absence of such a culture, future partisans are likely to struggle to promote the political projects they set themselves to the general public: their ideals will fall on deaf ears. An obligation to uphold such a culture might entail for instance a responsibility not to deny the reality of political

⁴⁷ See e.g. 'Political Cross-Dressing', Editorial, *The Nation*, 22nd July 2002: <http://www.thenation.com/article/political-cross-dressing#>

disagreement with adversaries, or cast it in merely technical terms when it concerns ends as well as means – temptations to which Third Way parties were famously prone.⁴⁸ The disavowal of principled differences in the present is liable to make critical perspectives harder for future participants in the democratic process to articulate. Succeeding partisans become more likely to struggle ineffectually.

Questions of organisation and leadership are also central to a party's sustainability. Partisans who allow their party to be dominated by a single individual, though they may boost its fortunes in the short term by drawing on personal charisma, put its longer-term prospects in doubt. Not only does individual domination risk displacing programmatic commitments with the politics of personality, but it leaves the party closely tied to the individual's reputation – and easily tarnished with it.⁴⁹ Problems of leadership succession are also accentuated in such cases. (The British Conservatives under Thatcher would be one case in point.) It is for such reasons that historically some of the party leaderships to have left the strongest legacy for their successors have been relatively collegial in structure.⁵⁰ Absolute command has not been sought, or it has been restrained by the efforts of partisan peers. In an increasingly mediatised environment, and especially in presidential systems, elements of personalisation are inescapable.⁵¹ But they can be amplified or contained. Rarely are they indispensable to a party's success.⁵² For partisan successors, the legacy of dispersed authority is likely to be more solid than that of one-person rule.

These are some of the important ways partisans may be said to have obligations to seek the sustainability of their practices.

⁴⁸ On the tendency of ordinary partisans in the context of the Third Way to disavow political differences and adopt an increasingly managerial self-understanding, see Weltman & Billig 2001.

⁴⁹ On Labour's vulnerability once dependent on Blair's charisma, and on the drop in party membership and support suffered once his leadership became 'toxic' after the Iraq war, see McAnulla 2011.

⁵⁰ Cf. Brown 2014 on the collegiality e.g. of Labour under Atlee (pp.114ff.) or the ANC under Mandela (pp.183ff.).

⁵¹ Cf. McAllister 2006.

⁵² Cf. King 2002.

It may be wondered whether there is still not something problematic about the notion that future partisans can be harmed by the actions of their predecessors. If later generations encounter the party in a sufficiently adequate state that they wish to associate with it, this is reasonable evidence, it might be said, that their predecessors did not behave irresponsibly. The enduring willingness to affiliate is evidence that no harm was done. Alternatively, where earlier generations do behave irresponsibly and the party loses its appeal to would-be partisans, again it may be said that no harm was done, for the successors who might raise a complaint do not exist. Plausible as it may sound, this challenge is too dichotomous. It must be expected that a party will continue to attract partisans even in a compromised state, due to its still representing the best option available for those of a certain political persuasion. (Alternative parties may be wholly unpalatable, and the costs of establishing a new party high.) For these partisans still drawn to the party, the task they face is made more arduous by their party's diminished condition. As a class then, even if not as determinate individuals, future partisans can be left with stronger or weaker prospects, according to the condition in which the party is transferred.⁵³ Decisions made in the present will predictably affect the challenges that succeeding partisans must face.

Furthermore, the obligations associated with a norm of sustainability, though directed towards future partisans, also connect to partisans of the past and present. Sustainability is the condition of respect being accorded by present-day partisans to the future-oriented actions of their predecessors and peers, since these actions gain their meaning from the reasonable expectation they will be advanced not just by one particular generation (the present one) but also by others continuing into a more distant future. Consequently, while such a norm is geared to the welfare of partisans-to-be in its concern that the point of departure for *their* projects be favourable, it aims also to protect the future-oriented projects of those who came before.⁵⁴

⁵³ Cf. Feinberg 1980, pp.181-2.

⁵⁴ Cf. Meyer 1997, pp.144-5; O'Neill 1993, p.42.

It remains the case that sometimes considerations of fidelity and sustainability may clash, or (purely on the descending side) that there may be a tension between preserving the party as a coherent normative unity and ensuring its material survival. It is not difficult to imagine occasions when there is a tension between consistency of programme and the party's material prosperity as an organisation, even its survival.⁵⁵ But to acknowledge such clashes is already to grant the reality of cross-temporal considerations. How they are then to be weighed is a matter for situated judgement.

IV. Objections

In these final paragraphs, let me examine a cluster of objections to the article's argument. First, it may be asked whether the obligations I have described, to the extent that they are embraced by the partisan, are not liable to divert from the fulfilment of competing obligations, e.g. to the political community as a whole. If, for example, a party of government can save lives by shifting policy in a way that breaches fidelity, should its partisans not override their cross-temporal obligations without hesitation? One can imagine various states of emergency in which this might apply (leaving aside the fact that in such scenarios a norm of fidelity may equally be a useful source of orientation). Likewise, what about the party that consistently pursues immoral ends? Are the members of a party with racist traditions not morally obliged to seek as clean a rupture with the party's past as possible, if not the dissolution of the party? In such cases a norm of fidelity would seem simply an impediment to civic virtue.⁵⁶

⁵⁵ Note one need not suppose organisational survival necessarily trumps ideational survival – arguably some ideas are worth the party dying for.

⁵⁶ As Simmons puts it, proceeding from a distinction between 'local associative obligations' and 'external principles': 'it seems appropriate to ask why our moral attention should ever be focused locally rather than on the more weighty general moral concerns that require action far beyond (and sometimes in competition with) what is required by our local role obligations' (Simmons 1996, p.269).

Clearly there is a difference between sketching these obligations at a general level and identifying their force in the particular instance. It has not been the article's argument that partisan cross-temporal obligations necessarily trump countervailing concerns, but rather that they should be recognised as one element in the moral calculus. *Ceteris paribus* they hold force, but there will be occasions when they are outweighed by competing concerns.⁵⁷ Discharging an obligation will not always be the right thing to do, but it is a consideration to take seriously as part of the deliberative process that seeks to establish what the right thing to do may be.⁵⁸

In the case of a persistent tension between norms – as in the case of the racist party – one might prefer to see cross-temporal obligations as not merely outweighed but *dissolved*. F.W. de Klerk was, one might argue, under no obligation whatsoever to be faithful to the traditions of the South African National Party, nor to seek to advance the sustainability of his party. No trace of blame – as a breach of obligation might imply – should be attached to the rupture in policy he heralded. Although it is tempting in this way to limit the idea of cross-temporal obligation to what one might call 'respectable' parties, I prefer to see these obligations as existent but persistently outweighed in such parties.⁵⁹ Without contextual knowledge, one should note, it is unclear that the good of the polity is necessarily better served by the breach of cross-temporal partisan obligations rather than by their observance and thus the persistence of the party in a form which makes it and its ideas a visible target of condemnation.

A second, related challenge to the argument resembles the first in inverted form. Cross-temporal obligations are generally trivial, it may be said, destined not so much to distract from competing obligations as to pale beside them (not to mention the temptations of power and prestige). The claims of predecessors and successors will never be sufficiently strong to deflect partisans from what other kinds of obligation require them to do. Here one is being asked to

⁵⁷ On the force of moral requirements, Klosko 2005, pp.76ff.

⁵⁸ Cf. Simmons 1979, pp.8-10.

⁵⁹ For a similar argument, see Tamir 1993 p.101; for critical discussion, see Horton 2010, pp.160-1.

consider whether partisan cross-temporal obligations are really sufficiently consequential to be weighed at all.

It is by no means clear that such obligations will always be trivial. There may be occasions when competing obligations balance each other, or when it is uncertain what actions they prescribe. In such cases, considerations to do with fidelity and sustainability may tip the balance in favour of one course of action over another.⁶⁰ They may be decisive, in other words, even when they are not the most crucial considerations in play.

Furthermore, even obligations that are rarely decisive may still be worthy of recognition. Those that the article has sought to describe retain significance even if weakly observed and rarely a sufficient guide to action. They introduce an additional source of pressure on the partisan to justify their normative position, in particular to say how specific commitments square with one another and with others previously held, also to explain why a given party is the most appropriate means to pursue certain goals. These obligations also offer a resource by which fellow partisans and the wider citizenry can hold their leaders to account. A celebrated thesis in the study of partisanship holds that party elites have a tendency to separate themselves from the rest of the party membership, pursuing a distinct set of interests and thereby undermining the normative programme.⁶¹ The idea of cross-temporal partisan obligations offers an important corrective mechanism, an ideal standard against which to assess decision-making and with which to counter the tendencies of an elite to retreat into a self-referential world. It offers a basis on which to integrate the party around the commitments claimed as the basis of its unity. It further may cultivate reasonable scepticism, amongst the partisans of a given party and amongst unaligned citizens more generally, towards the celebration of novelty, or cognate processes such as

⁶⁰ Cf. Ridge 2003, p.49.

⁶¹ Michels (1959 / 1915).

‘modernisation’, as goods in themselves, without need of further justification.⁶² Thus even in a merely negative fashion, in the form of the denunciation of breach, the obligations we have examined may be considered significant in various respects.

It might still be argued that the account I have presented is too constricting for partisans themselves. The concern is perhaps not that the standards of fidelity and sustainability force them into the role of the conservative: after all, the normative programmes advanced with greatest constancy over time may well be amongst the most politically radical. But what space does this account preserve for their independence of mind and critical capacity? Are they not condemned to an unthinking role, habitually seeking continuity with their party’s past? It needs emphasise that where individuals wish to break decisively with existing commitments they retain the option to exit their party. They can renounce the larger part of their partisan obligations and revert at least temporarily to the status of non-partisan citizens, perhaps before founding a new party.⁶³ This is one way that radical novelty of thought and practice can find expression, notwithstanding the significant institutional barriers that may impede it.⁶⁴ That obligations may be repudiated in the exceptional moment does not nullify their force under normal conditions.

To be sure, under imperfect institutional conditions it is not easy to found a successful new party. If the electoral system makes it difficult for small parties to gain representation in the legislature (e.g. because there are thresholds of minimum support), new parties will need to work hard to establish themselves. Institutions can be redesigned to strengthen proportionality, but only

⁶² Such scepticism might usefully constrain not only the elites of established parties but those of new, anti-establishment parties tempted to define themselves exclusively in terms of their detachment from the past.

⁶³ It may be questioned whether leaving the party is not just as great a breach of fidelity as participating in its radical revision from within. In one important respect it is not: exit leaves the party intact, as an organization and an idea, for others to maintain or resurrect, whereas radical change from within obstructs this possibility, preventing others inheriting and continuing the partisan project in a recognisable form.

⁶⁴ Questions of loyalty and exit raise many important issues that cannot be examined here. For instance, if it can be said that radical revisionists have an obligation to *leave* the party rather than subvert it from within, do traditionalists have an obligation to *stick* with it so as to stand up for the commitments of predecessors? As mainly functional rather than ethical questions, these appear in Hirschman’s insightful discussion of exit, voice and loyalty (Hirschman 1970, esp. chap. 7).

under certain conditions.⁶⁵ Launching a new party is likely to be an option of last resort, challenging to exercise and of uncertain outcome.⁶⁶ But it remains an important possibility. And even were it true that the chances for major innovation lay exclusively within the confines of existing parties, a norm of fidelity might still carry force, albeit in an attenuated form: as the obligation to publicise the extent of a party's transformation, e.g. by surrendering the symbols that evoke its continuity, including its name and its imagery. Such an act of separation would ensure revisionist partisans do not unfairly benefit from a misleading association with the endeavours of their predecessors, and would insulate the actions of the latter from the doctrinal shifts that might distort their original meaning. It would further leave intact the identity of the older tradition for a later set of partisans to reconnect to.

Conclusion

The article has argued for a conception of the political party that includes cross-temporal partisan obligations. It has sought to show how these are implied by the good reasons for which ordinary partisans may join the party, and the nature of the goals parties define themselves by. Meaningful partisanship, it has been suggested, relies on the idea of the party as advancing an ongoing project. The obligations that ensue take both ascending and descending forms, corresponding to what I have called norms of *fidelity* and *sustainability* respectively.

In the parties of contemporary western democracies, elites are frequently denounced precisely for having reneged on such obligations. In the post-Cold War period especially, partisan traditions are said to have been neglected or systematically undermined by leaders at the helm of a

⁶⁵ Cf. Katz & Mair 2009 p.759 for examples of courts giving safeguards to small parties.

⁶⁶ For the same reason its existence is hardly sufficient to absolve present-day partisans of their obligations to partisan successors.

wide range of parties, both Left and Right, often in tandem with the celebration of a politics of pragmatism which makes the reactivation of such traditions by future partisans ever harder. This is one way to understand the nature of those ‘cartel parties’ which scholars in comparative politics tell us are increasingly common.⁶⁷ The maintenance of meaningful divisions of opinion between parties would seem to depend in large part on the extent to which cross-temporal obligations of the kind described are observed. Partisans that breach such obligations are liable to end up looking rather alike, tempted to collude rather than criticise. Perhaps one should not be surprised that these developments coincide with declining rates of party membership. While there is no mono-causal explanation to be given, one may wonder whether this does not stem at least in part from the good reasons to join a party being nullified by those partisan elites who show little awareness of cross-temporal obligation. Parties with no discernible past and future convey little sense that they stand for something. Elites who act as though a presentist conception of the party were adequate contribute to the decline of existing parties: the model is an unstable one.

Perhaps in the same instant that they weaken existing organisations, these transgressions make a contribution, however modest, to the renewal of the partisan idea. To put it in Durkheimian terms, they offend the partisan *conscience collective*, and by provoking denunciation they give this ethos new visibility. Converting this into a productive source of pressure on decision-making is likely to depend on the strengthening of intra-party institutions that can authoritatively interpret a party’s foundational commitments, and combining these with mechanisms for intra-party deliberation such that the kinds of norm we have examined can be compellingly invoked in party debate.

Those who celebrate spontaneous movements as an alternative to party commitment apparently believe a more episodic form of political engagement can adequately stand in for one

⁶⁷ Katz & Mair, 2009.

founded on long-term projects – or at least that it is the next best thing. My remarks on the party in time indicate some of the questions to be asked of these competing modes of engagement. What kinds of rationale do they rely on, and how far can these be detached from notions of commitment to a cumulative project? Are social movements so different from parties in their ethical basis? Can there be genuine solidarity in the absence of cross-temporal obligation? A wider ethics of activism would need to engage with such questions.

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